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8 APPLICATIONS RECEIVED FOR EVM VERIFICATION: POLL PANEL

The EC said eight aggrieved candidates have sought verification of tampering or modification of micro-controller chips in EVMs. The BJP's Ahmednagar candidate Sujay Vikhe-Patil, who lost to Nilesh Lanke of the NCP (Sharad Pawar), sought verification of EVMs from 40 polling stations. A YSR Congress Party and a Desiya Murpokku Dravida Kazhagam candidate in Tamil Nadu are also among those who have sought verification. In all, verification is sought for 92 polling stations in six states.

● PANEL TO SCRUTINISE NTA ● UGC-NET PAPER LEAKED ON DARK NET

Institutional failure of NTA: Govt

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@ New Delhi

UNDER fire over alleged irregularities in the NEET-UG and the UGC-NET, Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan on Thursday admitted that consecutive paper leak cases affecting the lives of at least 35 lakh students represent an institutional failure of the National Testing Agency (NTA).

He announced the formation of a high-level panel to scrutinise the functioning of the NTA, which conducted those exams. The panel will comprise eminent individuals, sociologists and education experts who will examine the NTA's structure, functioning, exam processes, transparency and data management, he said.

By taking responsibility, we have to rectify the system. We are committed to exams with zero errors. I request everyone to not spread rumours

Dharmendra Pradhan

Pradhan's announcement came a day after the NTA cancelled the UGC-NET after it got confirmation that the question paper was leaked on the dark net. The matter is now under investigation by the CBI.

Addressing concerns about the NEET-UG as well, Pradhan said isolated instances of malpractice should not unfairly impact lakhs of students who legitimately passed the exam. He urged the Opposition not to politicise the matter and assured strict actions against any the guilty, including NTA officials.

"Let us have faith in our systems; no irregularities or malpractices will be tolerated by the government," he said.

Regarding the cancellation of the UGC-NET exam for junior research fellows, assistant professors, and PhD scholars, Pradhan revealed that the exam paper had been leaked on the Telegram site. He, however, added that the government was committed to maintaining the integrity of the examination process and sought people's trust in the system.

Pradhan said although an anti-cheating bill had been approved by both Houses of Parliament earlier this year, the law ministry is currently refining the associated regulations. "At present, we lack effective measures to confront such challenges (paper leaks)," he said.

"Modern software such as Telegram is often utilised to leak exam questions. When administering exams for PhD scholars, ensuring high standards is crucial. Despite the difficulties, we are committed to addressing them. New examination dates for the UGC-NET will be announced shortly," he said.

The results of NEET-UG conducted on May 5 with approximately 24 lakh candidates was announced on June 4. An unprecedented 67 students got the perfect score of 720 on 720, raising concerns about irregularities.

Students protest against alleged malpractices in NEET-UG and UGC-NET, in New Delhi on Thursday | PTI

SC stays proceedings on NEET-UG in HCs, issues notices to NTA, govt

SUCHITRA KALYAN MOHANTY
@ New Delhi

THE Supreme Court on Thursday stayed all proceedings before various high courts on the the conduct of the NEET-UG exam and issued notices to the National Testing Agency (NTA) and the Centre on a fresh bunch of pleas against irregularities in the exam.

A two-judge vacation bench of justices Vikram Nath and S V N Bhatti was hearing the NTA's request to transfer all cases filed in various high courts on the matter to itself. The bench tagged it along with other pending pleas for hearing on July 8.

The court reiterated its refusal to stay the counselling. More than 35 petitions have been filed in the top court, including a fresh petition by a group of 20 students, seeking the scrapping of the NEET-UG 2024 and an SC-monitored probe by the CBI or any other independent agency into the alleged irregularities.

"All this has been argued from day one and they (some petitioners) have been wanting stay of counselling. We have denied that. Ultimately, if all of you succeed, everything will go," the bench told the petitioners, one of whom sought deferment of the counselling till July 8.

Delhi court grants bail to Kejriwal

SUCHITRA KALYAN MOHANTY
@ New Delhi

IN a big relief to Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, a Delhi court on Thursday granted him bail in the money laundering case that stems from the alleged excise scam.

Kejriwal is the prime accused in the case related to the now scrapped Delhi liquor policy.

The court granted bail after directing Kejriwal to furnish a personal bail bond of ₹1 lakh.

Vacation Judge of the Rouse Avenue Court, Niyay Bindu, declined the Enforcement Directorate's request to keep the bail order in abeyance for 48 hours to allow it to appeal.

Kejriwal is expected to come out of Tihar Jail by Friday evening after furnishing the bail bond and completing other formalities.

The judge also directed Kejriwal to appear before the court whenever required and to cooperate with the investigation.

It is to be noted that as the summer vacations are currently going on in courts, it's the duty judges who hear important cases involving human liberty and bail matters.

Ex-Indian pacer David Johnson passes away

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@ Bengaluru

FORMER Indian cricketer **David Jude Johnson** reportedly died after he fell off the balcony of his fourth floor apartment at Kothanur in the city on Thursday around 10.30 am.

He was 52. Johnson was living with his family at SLV Paradise Apartment in Kanakashri Layout. His wife is said to have told police that Johnson slipped and fell off the balcony. However, police suspect it to be a case of suicide.

According to police, Johnson was dealing with alcohol-related issues and had joined a de-addiction centre in the city a few months ago.

The former Indian pacer was admitted to a private hospital in Ashoknagar last week for a stomach-related illness and was discharged three days ago. P3

EXPRESS READ

Premium liquor prices to be slashed from July 1

Bengaluru: The prices of premium liquor in the state will come down drastically from July 1 with the state government issuing a draft notification on Thursday. The excise department has invited objections, if any, for reduction on 16 categories of high-end liquor | P4

TN hooch tragedy toll now 38, 118 still in hosp

Chennai: The death toll in the illicit arrack tragedy in Kallakurichi went up to 38 on Thursday as several victims undergoing treatment at hospitals died. At least 118 people are still undergoing treatment with 24 of in critical condition | P5

SHGs to collect property tax, water cess dues

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Bengaluru

THE state cabinet on Thursday approved a proposal to take the help of women's Self-Help Groups (SHGs) to collect property tax and water cess arrears. It decided to give 5% of the amount collected to the SHG members as an incentive.

The members will also collect property tax and water cess for the current year. Property tax arrears amounting to Rs 1,860 crore and water cess dues of Rs 20.25 crore have to be recovered.

Law Minister HK Patil told reporters that urban local bodies in the state will have an estimated population of 202.58 lakh in their limits by 2025. At present, there are 51.51 lakh houses and of them, 30.05 lakh have drinking water connections. With around 40% water cess pending in all urban local bodies, the officials have been directed to review collection of dues every month, the minister said.